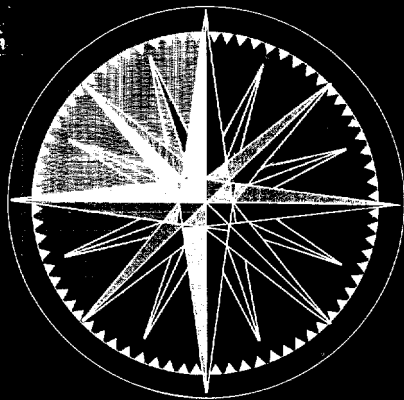


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SPECIAL REPORT

OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

KURDISH NATIONALISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

MORI/CDF Pages 1 and 3-9

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21 June 1963

KURDISH NATIONALISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The military campaign Baghdad began on 11 June against the Iraqi Kurds is the latest in a long series of clashes between Kurdish tribes and Middle East regimes. Some four million Kurds located in contiguous areas of Iraq, Turkey, Iran, and Syria have been a problem to the governments of these states since the end of World War I, when nationalism made its first gains in this part of the world. Although their aspiration to a state of their own has never died, the Kurds appeared in recent years to have become reconciled to seeking local autonomy without independence. However, ex-dictator Qasim's policies sparked the present rebellion in Iraq, which has continued since August 1961.

Lack of Kurdish Unity

Most Kurds are Sunni (orthodox) Moslems linked by the Kurdish language--not a single language but a group of dialects differing widely among themselves and akin to Persian. Although powerful local dynasties have arisen at different times in various parts of Kurdistan, the Kurds have never existed in a national state and have little written literature or national history. Tribal feeling is still stronger than national feeling, and revolts by one group of tribes often have left others unaffected. In the present generation, however, new factors of unity have been developing.

Kurdish Rebellions

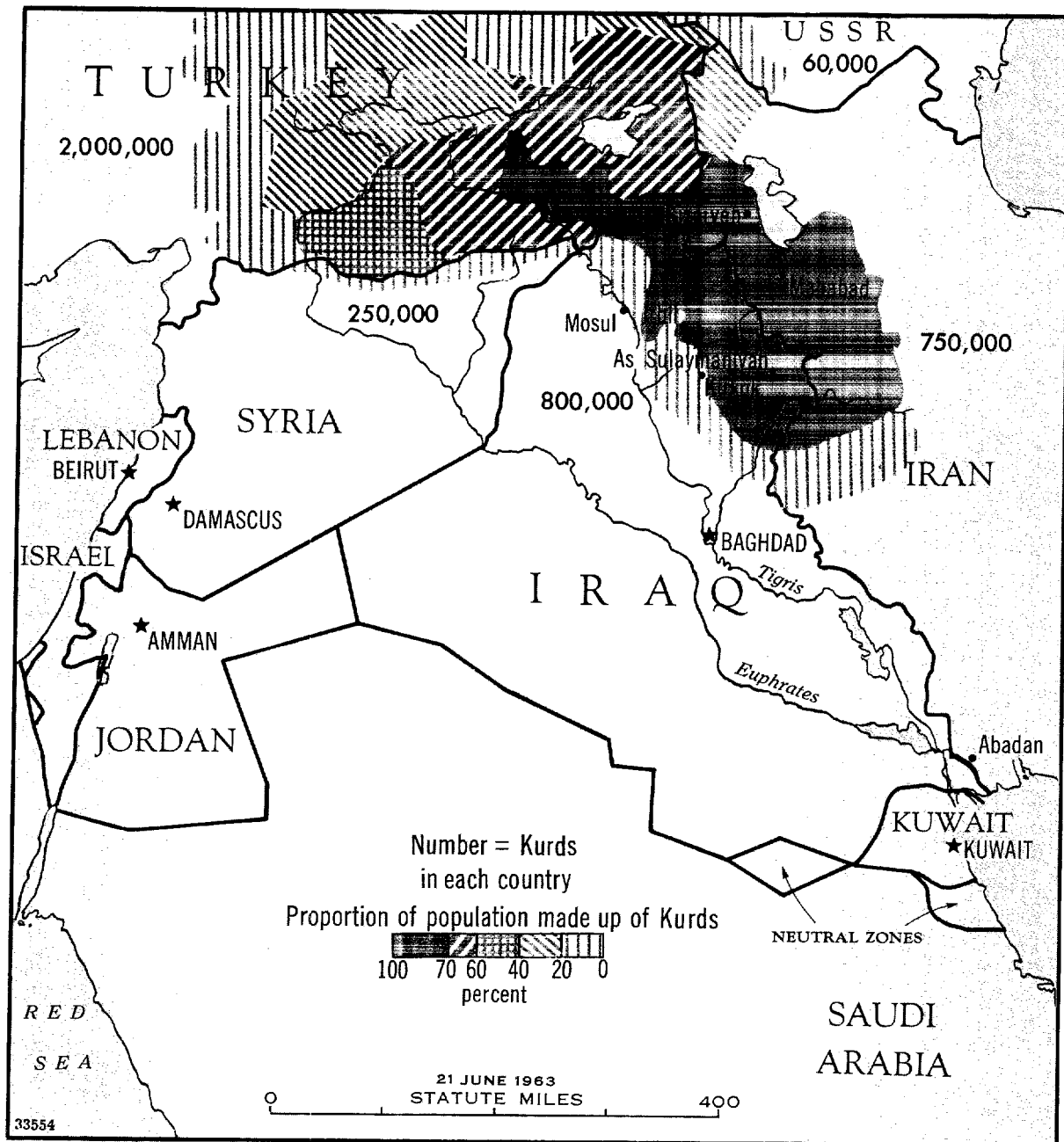
The Kurds gained their first hope of autonomy when the World War I Allies endorsed the concept. The abortive Treaty of

Sevres (1920) envisioned an independent Kurdish state in former Ottoman territory. When no such state was created, the stage was set for the first Kurdish rebellion in 1922. Sheik Mahmud of Sulaymaniyah proclaimed himself "King of Kurdistan," and organized the "Government of Southern Kurdistan"--claiming the Kurdish areas of the new mandated territory of Iraq. Not until 1924 was the Iraqi Government--with the assistance of the British--able to establish its authority over these Kurdish areas.

Under the terms of the mandate, the British Government agreed that the officials of administration, justice, and education in the Kurdish areas should be Kurds, and Kurdish recognized as an official language. While the British mandate and subsequent independent Iraqi governments on the whole followed this policy, many Kurds

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never fully reconciled themselves to a status short of independence.

Mahmud's rebellion was followed by an extensive and bloody one by Turkey's two million Kurds in 1925 and another one in 1930. Mahmud led another in Iraq two years later, yet another in 1930-31 and Sheik Ahmad of Barzan instigated one in 1932.

Mulla Mustafa al-Barzani

Mulla Mustafa al-Barzani, Ahmad's brother and leader of the present Iraqi Kurdish resistance, came into prominence in 1943 as leader of the last Kurdish revolt against the Iraqi king. Baghdad's futile efforts to suppress this revolt were finally called off after negotiations and a promise to look into Kurdish grievances. However, little was done to carry out reforms, and the revolt flared up again in 1945.

This time Barzani's forces were defeated and he and his band fled with their families into Iran, where the Kurds had thrown off Tehran's authority after the Allied wartime occupation. With them went a number of petty Iraqi officials and schoolteachers of Kurdish descent, as well as some Kurdish deserters from the Iraqi armed forces. Among the latter were a dozen army officers, some of whom had been trained in England and had held posts on the



Stamp issued by
"The Government of
Southern Kurdistan"
(1923).

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Iraqi general staff. Their presence testified both to Barzani's leadership qualities and to the growing appeal of Kurdish nationalism.

Mulla Mustafa met the commanding general of the Soviet forces then occupying the western part of Iranian Azerbaijan. On the Soviet's suggestion he placed himself under the orders of Qadi Muhammad, leader of the Soviet-inspired Democratic Party of Kurdistan (KDP), which had branches throughout the Kurdish area. When the eastern part of Azerbaijan revolted against Tehran and came under control of an "Azerbaijan People's Republic," Qadi Muhammad declared his own western area independent and inaugurated the Kurdish People's Republic. Barzani received the rank of "marshal" and appeared in a Soviet-style uniform, complete with high boots, epaulets, and red-banded garrison cap.

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SECRETRefuge in USSR

Soviet support was gradually withdrawn, however, and the Iranian Government refused to accept Kurdish autonomy. It soon reconquered the area. Barzani and about 300 of his tribesmen fought their way northward and escaped into Russia in June 1947, where they remained for 11 years.

Despite his long residence in Russia, Barzani remains a Kurdish nationalist. Even Communist Kurds feel so strongly on the autonomy issue that they have insisted on a separate Kurdish branch of the Communist Party. Dissension between this branch and the Arab Communists over Kurdish nationalist aspirations is chronic.

Barzani and Qasim

Soon after the coup in Iraq in July 1958, Barzani and his

**BARZANI**

followers returned there at the invitation of coup leader Qasim. Relations between Barzani and Qasim began cordially; however, as time passed and Barzani's expectations of Kurdish autonomy were unfulfilled, he apparently realized that this Iraqi government, too, intended to suppress Kurdish separatism.

Barzani then began political agitation partly through the KDP, which had maintained an ephemeral existence with Communist help since the 1940s and which he now led. The Kurds' demands at that time did not go beyond more favorable tax treatment, education in their own language, and a pro-Kurdish interpretation of that article of the Iraqi constitution guaranteeing full equality between Arabs and Kurds.

When Qasim refused these demands, Barzani and his followers rebelled in the summer of 1961. Because of tribal rivalries, Barzani was unable to rally all of the Iraqi Kurds to his cause, and some tribes even assisted the government forces in the military campaign. More recently, indications have appeared that Barzani, while recognized as the Kurds' war leader, is being gradually supplanted as head of the KDP by younger and better educated men.

As the insurrection continued unabated until Qasim's overthrow in February 1963, rivalries became gradually

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submerged beneath an open Kurdish-Arab antagonism. Barzani's success in frustrating the Iraqi Army's punitive campaign and its indiscriminate bombing of Kurdish villages turned many neutral Kurds against the government and gradually changed the character of the fighting into a nationalist movement for Kurdish autonomy.

Iraqi Kurdish leaders initially cooperated with the new Baathist regime in Baghdad. Prospects of concessions to the Kurds brightened considerably. Despite almost continual negotiations, however, the government's dilatory attitude--and its reinforcement of military posts in the Kurdish area--convinced the Kurds of its insincerity. Present Kurdish demands are for local autonomy, a larger share of government spending in the Kurdish area, use of the Kurdish language in local government, and teaching of Kurdish in local schools.

Iran's Attitude

Iran has not faced any overt resistance from its own Kurds since 1947, but its attitude toward the rebellion in Iraq has been somewhat devious. On the official level Tehran has assured Baghdad that it is neutral and that Iranian authorities are ready to discuss cooperation in maintaining security along their common border.

Turkey Calm

Traditionally Turkey has denied having any Kurdish minority problem, preferring rather to regard its Kurds as "mountain Turks." Kurds serve in the National Assembly and in the armed forces. Administrative supervision by the central government in the Kurdish areas of eastern Turkey is kept to a minimum, although the security forces maintain firm control to assure law and order and to maintain the flow of Kurdish recruits to the armed forces.

Despite intermittent reports during recent years of clandestine organization among the Kurds in Turkey, there has been no confirmation of insurgency, and government control is believed firm. The Kurds realize that Ankara would ruthlessly suppress any appearance of active opposition to the regime.

The Turks tend to view the current Kurdish revolt in Iraq as basically an Iraqi problem, although they realize that if successful the Barzani movement aimed at forming an independent Kurdish state would have its impact among the Kurds of Turkey.

Following an official approach from Baghdad, the Turkish Government agreed to take the necessary action to close the border between the two countries. It reportedly had made the necessary military shifts to assure better control of the border area.

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SECRETEgyptian Involvement

Egypt under Nasir has offered propaganda support to the Kurds, but evidently no material aid. Egyptian interest in the Kurds began during the Iraqi royal regime. Prior to the 1958 coup Egyptian agents were reportedly active among Iraqi Kurds and Cairo began Kurdish-language broadcasts. These included Kurdish national songs, political interpretations, and newscasts stressing the Kurds' desire for independence.

Although Turkey has officially maintained that its Kurds had been assimilated and constitute no problem, the Turkish interior minister in 1958 admitted that agitation by Egyptian embassy personnel in Ankara had caused trouble.

Cairo continued its propaganda support of the Iraqi Kurds throughout the Qasim regime. After last February's coup Nasir expressed his sympathy with Kurdish goals and received Iraqi Kurdish leaders in Cairo. Since the recent outbreak of fighting, Cairo radio has openly espoused their cause--thus pushing another thorn into the side of the Baathists' Baghdad regime. Cairo's Arabic broadcasts have charged that "criminals" in the Iraqi Government are responsible for the anti-Kurdish campaign.

Soviet Attitude

The revolt against Qasim faced the Soviet Union with a dilemma. Although Moscow had long fostered the idea of an "independent" Kurdistan under Soviet influence, with the friendly Qasim regime holding power

in Baghdad, the USSR was restrained in its attitude toward the Kurds. In the summer of 1962, Communist propaganda began to champion the national rights of the Kurds as Iraqi citizens, and increasingly violent attacks on Qasim's policy of "national extermination" of the Kurds appeared in Communist pamphlets circulated in Iraq, in the Soviet journal Problems of Peace and Socialism, and on the clandestine radio stations in Eastern Europe of the Iranian and Turkish Communist parties.

The pro-Kurdish propaganda resumed immediately after the fighting was renewed early this June. Both Izvestia and Pravda published articles supporting Barzani and the Kurdish cause and a TASS statement charged the Iraqi Government with "Hitlerite" treachery, the use of "fascist SS detachments," and genocide. It added that Baghdad's Kurdish policy is a violation of the US charter and a matter of concern for all nations.

Assessment

Despite Barzani's extensive residence in the Soviet Union and Moscow's growing volume of pro-Kurdish propaganda, the Kurdish nationalist movement, has so far remained free of Soviet domination. Iran and Egypt have also had little influence on the course of recent events. As the present campaign continues, however, the likelihood that the Kurds will accept foreign aid, including Soviet help, will increase rapidly, and the possibility that the nationalist movement will spread beyond Iraq's borders will also grow. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM)

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